

# BATCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Rob Sage

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**Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Batcombe Parish Council held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013 in the Old School, Batcombe, commencing at 8.00pm.**

**Present - Councillors:** Chris Wildridge – Chairman, Jayne Cox, Iona FitzGerald, Ian Sage and Justin Witcombe.

**Also Present:** The Clerk – Rob Sage and one member of the public.

**3510 – Apologies for Absence:** Liz Hollis – who was away, David Stevens – District Councillor and Nigel Woollcombe-Adams – County Councillor. It was noted that the meeting clashed with the District Council Planning Board Meeting, and the District and County Councillors were both members of the Planning Board.

**3511 – Filling of Parish Council Vacancy by Co-option and Acceptance of Office:** The Clerk reported that John Sommer was the only person to express an interest in serving on the Council. John was nominated by Justin Witcombe, seconded by Jayne Cox and duly co-opted onto the Council. John then signed his Acceptance of Office.

**3512 – Declarations of Interest and Granting of Dispensations:** Ian Sage and Jayne Cox declared an interest in the planning application for Hedgestocks. Iona FitzGerald declared a pecuniary interest in the applications for tree works at Rockwells House and at Brook House as her husband was the tree surgeon.

**3513 – Public Participation:** None.

**3514 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013** were approved and signed by the Chairman.

**3515 – Matters Arising:** Trees growing into the cricket net – Iona FitzGerald noted that this was only a small tree and volunteered her husband to prune it back when he was not busy.

**3516 – Footpaths and Highways:** The Chairman had spoken to Ginnie Jones from the Mendip Bridleways and Byways Association (MBBA) about the Parish Council contributing to additional expenses of repairing the Honeycliff bridleway. The Council agreed to pay 50% of the estimated £25 via the MBBA.

**Appointment of Parish Paths Liaison Officer (PPLO):** The PPLO works with the County Council's Rights of Way Department, and the local Rights of Way Area Warden Clare Haskins, to help look after the footpaths and one bridleway in the parish. Jayne Cox volunteered to be the Parish Council's PPLO and was appointed. Jayne had spoken to the gardener at Rockwells House about the water running across the footpath at the bottom of Mill Lane and he had apparently sorted it out as well as he was able but there was a problem with a spring in that area.

Iona FitzGerald reported the offer of a parishioner to trim the footpaths in the parish. As the person concerned did not wish to take part in the County Council's Strimmer Project, the Parish Council did not feel it could accept as he would not have the necessary insurance.

The County Council had informed the Parish Council that Mill Lane would be closed for six days from 29<sup>th</sup> July for resurfacing. Concerns were raised about the state of the road near Batcombe House following the recent resurfacing. The County Council had stated that highway verges would be cut between June 10<sup>th</sup> and August 5<sup>th</sup>.

A complaint had been received from Jeannette Smith about wheelie bins being left on the pavement along Kale Street which were forcing pedestrians to walk in the road and a nuisance when parking. Jayne Cox volunteered to investigate the rules about wheelie bins.

**3517 – Planning Applications:** Planning Application 2013/1131: Conversion and extension of existing stables to residential dwelling house. The Stable, Crows Hill, Batcombe. Full Planning Permission. It was agreed to bring this item forward on the Agenda. Mr David Cavender expressed his concerns about this application - that it would create a planning precedent so that anyone with a small plot of land in the countryside could build a stable and then convert it into a house. The Clerk noted that there was a long history of planning applications by the applicant for buildings on this site, including several for a residential dwelling which were refused because the site was well outside the development limit. The Clerk also noted that at the time the stables were being applied for, the applicant's appeal against the refusal of permission for a residential dwelling had been dismissed by the Planning Inspector. The Parish Council agreed to recommend Refusal of Permission on a majority decision as one Councillor was not opposed to the application. The grounds for recommending refusal were that change of use from agricultural to residential should not be allowed given the precedent this would create and that the Planning Inspector had dismissed the appeal for a residential dwelling on this site.

**3518 – Playing Field – Maintenance Report:** Moles were active in the Playing Field and it was agreed to use a molecatcher again. Jayne Cox volunteered to try and find a cheaper molecatcher than the one used previously. The drain tap on the water fountain in the shelter had seized up. Ian Sage volunteered to look at it and ask a local plumber if work was needed.

**New Play Equipment:** The Auction of Promises had raised £5,900 with the promise of a further £250 and the Cheese and Beer festival had raised £561.50. A further £500 had been promised £500 from the District Council's Community Environment Fund. This meant that the Playing Field Improvement funds stood at £13,818.18 with a further £750 promised, making £14,568.18 in total. The quotation for the new play equipment was £9,450 plus £5,000 for the zip wire (excluding VAT), a total of £14,450, leaving a possible surplus of £118.18. On this basis the Council agreed to commit to the order of the equipment from Mainstay Projects. A request for a deposit of 25% of the total (£4,335) had been received from Mainstay Projects and this was agreed. Iona FitzGerald noted that the equipment would probably now be installed at the end of June or the beginning of July. An offer of a donation for the old fort had been received but it was felt that it was likely to fall to pieces when being removed. The Clerk was asked to put details of when the equipment would be installed on the website.

Keep on the Grass would have liked any surplus money on the project to be donated to the Children's Christmas Treat Committee, which was very short of funds this year. As money raised for one purpose could not be given to a different one, it was agreed that the Parish Council should make a donation of £100 to the Children's Christmas Treat and any surplus from the fundraising for the Playing Field be put towards the cost of a post-installation inspection of the equipment by RoSPA. This would cost £395 (+VAT) but would be instead of the usual annual inspection. It was agreed to undertake the post-installation inspection.

**3519 – Coney Wood – Lease of the Wood:** The Clerk reported that the Woodland Trust were looking to lease out their smaller woods, such as Coney Wood, to local community groups including parish councils. Leases would typically be for 25 years at a peppercorn rent with covenants to maintain the site as amenity woodland (70% of the site as tree canopy) with open public access. The Woodland Trust has an estimated budget of £1,092 for Coney Wood for the next five years, mainly for litter picks and invasive plant control. There would also be obligations to maintain boundary fences and a spring. The costs however did not include any tree safety works that might be required. The Chairman felt that if the Parish Council leased the wood it would be seen as sustaining an amenity for the parish. Iona FitzGerald reported that her husband, who was a tree surgeon, was concerned that there were a large number of very high trees in the wood that were at risk of falling and could prove very costly to make safe given the difficulty in accessing the wood. It was felt the Council needed further information before making a decision. The Clerk was asked to contact the Woodland Trust to see if they had a recent tree survey for the wood and check with the insurers regarding the cost of insurance. It was felt that if the Parish Council was to go ahead with a lease, the proposal would have to be put to the parish as it would mean increasing the precept.

**3520 – Planning Applications:** Planning Application 2012/2428: Demolition of dwelling and erection of replacement dwelling as per amended plans received on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013. Hedgestocks, Batcombe. Full Planning Permission. The location of the new bungalow had been altered to bring it within the curtilage of the existing building and meet the objections of the case officer. The Parish Council had previously recommended approval and so did so again.

Planning Application 2013/0872: Proposed felling of a Thuja and pruning of a Yew tree in a Conservation Area. Rockwells House, Batcombe. TREE – Conservation Area. The Clerk reported that the tree officer had initially expressed concern at the felling of the Thuja (a Western Red Cedar) which was a healthy tree, but was happier with the proposal following a meeting with the applicant and his tree surgeon. Iona FitzGerald explained why the tree was being felled before leaving the room. The Council decided to recommend approval as the tree officer was happy with the application. It was noted that the period in which the District Council could object to the proposal had already passed, and that the tree officer had not informed the Parish Council of the date the application needed to be considered as he had promised.

Planning Application 2013/0916: Proposed felling of a tree in a Conservation Area. Meadow View, Kale Street, Batcombe. TREE – Conservation Area. This was a self-seeded Sycamore at the front of MeadowView, that was beginning to interfere with telephone wires from the adjacent telegraph pole and its roots were rupturing the tarmac of the pavement. The Parish Council recommended approval.

Planning Application 2013/1074: Proposed felling of a Horse Chestnut in a Conservation Area. Brook House, Batcombe. TREE – Conservation Area. The tree was near the boundary with Paddock House (at the bottom of Mill Lane). Iona FitzGerald explained that the tree had a history of multiple limb failures and would only be felled if a proposal to plant orchard trees went ahead. Iona then left the room and the Council decided to recommend approval.

**Planning Application Updates:** The house on land behind Chapel Row – letters had been sent to the District Council, the Planning Inspector and our MP expressing the concerns raised by local residents at the last meeting as well as an invitation to the owner of the house, Mr Marc Waller, inviting him to a meeting to discuss the concerns raised about his house. There had been no response from Mr Waller and an acknowledgement from the District Council. The Planning Inspectorate had written to state that they could not comment on appeal

decisions but noted that Planning Inspectors were appointed by the Secretary of State to act as independent adjudicators and reached their decisions after careful consideration of the evidence. Our MP David Heath had also written, stating that he could not intervene in respect of a particular decision but was of the opinion that such decisions were better made by communities themselves than by a planning inspector on behalf of Whitehall.

Chandler's House – it was noted that the application for 11 photovoltaic panels on the roof of Chandler's House in Kale Street was being considered by the District Council's Planning Board that evening.

**3521 – Parish Council Website:** A paper from the Chairman on possible future developments of the website had been distributed with the Agendas. The paper outlined how pages for local organisations such as the Horticultural Society could be included on the website, noting that the Parish Council would remain responsible for content included on the website. It was agreed to allow development of the website in line with the paper, depending on the time the Clerk had available. The Chairman also asked Councillors to consider placing photos and contact details on the website – these could be limited to an e-mail address that was forwarded to the Councillor's own e-mail.

**3522 – Appointment of Village Hall Representative:** Justin Witcombe volunteered to be the Parish Council's representative on the Village Hall Trust Committee and was appointed.

**3523 – Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013:** A copy of the financial statements had been distributed with the Agendas for the previous month. The precept and the VAT refund were in line with the budget. The grant for footpath maintenance had not yet been received. The rent from the allotments was £17.50 more than budgeted as the rent for the half allotment that had been vacant was paid after the end of the previous year. The money raised for the Playing Field improvements and the contributions towards the Jubilee programmes and tokens were not included in the budget.

The cost of the grass cutting in the Playing Field was more than budgeted because extra cuts were required. Playing Field maintenance included the cost of the molecatcher, a new padlock and chain for the gate and paint for the bus shelter but was less than budgeted because no Playbark was purchased for the fort. The cost of the new gate commemorating the Jubilee (£615 plus VAT) had not been budgeted.

The Clerk's salary was unchanged, although a small increase had been budgeted. Most other administration expenses were largely as budgeted, as were the grants given by the Council. The only money spent on the allotments was the £200 for the lease of the field. The Jubilee expenses were unbudgeted but were largely met by contributions from other organisations in the parish.

The net result of the variations against the budget was a surplus of £6,525 on the year instead of the expected surplus of £413. This is largely due to the £6,888 raised for the Playing Field improvements less the expense of the new Playing Field gate. At the end of the year the Parish Council had £10,807 in its funds, £7,374 more than anticipated in the budget. Of this £723 was set aside for the allotments and £7,357 was money raised for the Playing Field improvements, leaving £2,727 that was not earmarked for either the allotments or the Playing Field improvements.

It was agreed to allow the Allotments Holders Group to spend up to £100 each year on any items they might require.

**3524 – Annual Return for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013:** Copies of Section 1 of the Annual Return - the Statement of Accounts – had been enclosed with the Agendas, together with a copy of the Financial Statements showing how the figures in the Statement of Accounts had been derived. Approval of the Statement of Accounts was agreed.

Copies of Section 2 of the Annual Return - the Annual Governance Statement – had also been enclosed with the Agendas, together with copies of the Internal Auditor’s Report completed by Griff Williams; and approval of the Annual Governance Statement was also agreed.

**3525 – Precept and Update on Budget for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014:** The Clerk reported that the precept of £7,200 and the VAT repayment of £335.50 had been paid into the Council’s bank account. An update on the budget for the current year had been distributed with the Agendas. Most receipts and most payments were likely to be as budgeted. The exceptions were the money raised for the Playing Field improvements since the start of the year, expected to total £7,211, and the £17,340 which would be spent on the new play equipment for the Playing Field. There was also the additional expense of the post-installation inspection and the extra grant for the Children’s Christmas Treat Committee. In addition the VAT on the new play equipment would have to be reclaimed before the end of the year.

**3526 – Review of Financial Regulations:** An annual review of Financial Regulations was required under Standing Orders and by the Council’s external auditors. The Financial Regulations had been amended two years ago and no further amendments were felt necessary.

**3527 – Change of Bank Signatories:** A resolution was passed to add John Sommer to the bank signatories in addition to Chris Wildridge, Liz Hollis and Iona FitzGerald, who had been added at the last meeting. The Clerk is also a signatory but is not allowed to sign cheques.

**3528 – Annual Grants from the Parish Council:** It was agreed to provide the budgeted grants of £300 to the Village Hall (£100 for our own meetings, £150 for committee meetings of other village organisations and £50 to help with maintenance costs) and £200 to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard. It was also agreed to give three grants of £100 to the Children’s Christmas Treat Committee and to Mendip Community Transport under the section 137 power, and to the Mendip Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

**3529 - Authorisation of payment:** In addition to the above grants Councillors authorised the following payments:

- £4,335.00 Mainstay Projects – Deposit for new play equipment.
- £96.00 Mr G Sparkes – Grass cutting for May.
- £35.00 Community Council – Annual subscription for 2013/14. This payment was authorised by resolution under the s.137 power.
- £10.00 Somerset Playing fields Association – Annual subscription for 2013/14.

**3530 - Other Business - Matters of Information:** The Licensing Officer at South Somerset District Council had sent the Parish Council the result of the review of the Premises Licence for Farmfest. A total of 38 additional conditions had been imposed covering management plans, stewarding, safety, traffic and noise levels. There were noise limits set for different times, requirements for noise monitoring, a noise management strategy, and a hotline for local residents. The Clerk reported that Liz Hollis had examined the conditions and they were similar to the conditions imposed on the Sunrise Festival. The Licensing Officer also stated that South Somerset can no longer inform Parish Councils of licence applications as this could be construed as affecting their impartiality. However details of any new applications were

posted on their website. There were no new applications at present but the Liz Hollis was aware a small festival was being planned for September at Gilcombe Farm.

Copies of the Somerset East Police and Crime Plan for 2013-2017 had been received from the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Peter Lacey Permanent Memorial – The Clerk reported that SALC have suggested that a fitting memorial for Peter Lacey would be a bench on land in West Buckland (where Peter lived). Each member Council had been asked to donate £10 towards the cost of the bench. This would have to be a personal contribution from the Clerk and any Councillor who felt they had benefitted from Peter's training as the Council had no power to provide a bench in West Buckland.

Justin Witcombe asked if they was any progress on the repairs to Walter's Lane and Frys Lane.

**3531 – Date and Time of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013 at 8.00pm in the Old School, Batcombe.

*E Hollis*

*3/7/13*